

Battle Scars

As we endure life in this world, walking by faith and not by sight, walking in the Spirit of God and not in the flesh, seeking to serve the Lord and His Kingdom, doing that which He has commanded us – and entrusted us to do – it can get very lonely sometimes.

I think of the apostle Paul, whose letters – which he wrote from prison – are filled with sound doctrine and teaching; but also his deepest personal feelings, as he endured great loneliness, being separated from his friends and fellow believers in Christ.

Look at Second Timothy 1. He clearly missed his young friend, as he wrote: *“I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.*

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, – and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

“But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

And then Paul added, *“You are aware that all who are in Asia abandoned me.”* Yes, Paul was there, writing to Timothy from prison. He was jailed for preaching the Gospel of our Savior, and he was alone. No one stood with him. All had abandoned him.

Then in Chapter 4, we have this: *“Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry... When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.”*

In Second Corinthians, Paul describes what Christian ministry is REALLY like. Starting at verse 24: *“Five times I received, at the hands of the Jews, the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food,*

in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."

There are many today, who will tell you the Christian life is all joy and happiness. "Just walk the aisle," they say, "repeat the 'sinners prayer,' and MEAN IT," they'll tell you... And "Jesus has a wonderful plan for your life!" "Just ask Jesus into your heart and you will go from misery to 'your best life NOW!" But friends, this isn't true. This is a false Gospel... The fact of the matter is, the Christian life is NOT an easy one. It's NOT all happiness and joy. If you are TRULY living out your faith and serving Christ, you will find yourself in frequent persecution, you'll be mocked and ridiculed. You'll lose your friends. You may even find yourself being sued in court; you may lose your business, your home, your freedom, and yes, in some cases, even your family.

Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have NOT come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household."

You absolutely will NOT fit in with the modern culture if you are following Christ today. It is at that point you have a choice: keep your mouth shut and practice your "religion" in secret, in which case you will NOT endure any persecution and you can just "get along" with everyone – or you can be a faithful servant, obey the commands of Jesus and season this world with salt – being a beacon of light in a dark and dying culture. Yes, you HAVE that choice. So what will you choose?

Those who choose the latter often find themselves very lonely and very misunderstood. Because they walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh, the world cannot understand them. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and those without the Holy Spirit CANNOT understand. It's not that they don't

want to... they just don't have the Holy Spirit inside them, and therefore they CAN'T understand you.

"Religious" people will not understand you either. Many times you'll even be viewed as a "troublemaker" or a "crazy zealot" by those in your own church, if you dare step outside the box and actually DO the work Christ called you to. You WILL endure hardship and you WILL experience persecution if you're openly and faithfully and unashamedly living the Christian life. Those who preach "health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, roses and rainbows" are lying to you. You should ask yourself what their motivation is... and oftentimes, you'll find it's very simple: it's so that THEY can be well liked and popular among the people... and well PAID.

How lonely it must have been for Jesus Himself – MANY times – as even His own disciples had a hard time understanding some of His teachings. Yet He patiently taught them and explained to them the parables the world could not understand. And though they walked closely with Him for 3 1/2 years during His earthly ministry, on the night of His arrest, they all abandoned Him, when He needed His friends the most.

Look at Luke 22. Here, Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, following the Last Supper. He went there to pray with His disciples. But His disciples couldn't stay awake and watch with Him even one hour. How lonely our Savior must have been as He prayed, *"Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."* An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

Not exactly "health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, roses and rainbows"... is it? That was NEVER Jesus' message. That's a false Gospel, that creates false converts, who quickly fall away. As it has been said, *"everyone wants to follow Jesus – until they find out where He is going."* Now, I am NOT saying

that the Christian life is miserable. As a matter of fact, I don't know how ANYONE can make it through this life without Christ. There IS a peace. Though the world around you continues to spin out of control into chaos and evil, as a true believer in Jesus, you DO have peace in your heart.

As Paul wrote to the Philippians, *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* Friends, we would NOT NEED *"peace that passes all understanding"* if the Christian life were EASY. But BECAUSE we know Christ as our Savior, BECAUSE we have His Holy Spirit within us, we can have a peace of mind and heart that the world just cannot ever comprehend. But it's still, often, very lonely.

In the ministry work I do, I get a great many phone calls, emails and letters from those who are seeking answers, and often seeking my counsel. Some have grown children who have become wayward and left their faith behind. Some have unbelieving spouses who are carnal and worldly, rather than spiritual. Some deal with ridicule from co-workers. Most all of them have very shallow "friendships," with only a few at the churches they attend. They often have NO ONE they can fellowship with, or commune with or talk to about the deep and rich things of God. They feel so ALONE.

All of us, who carry the name of Christ and live out our faith – FOR REAL – have endured great emotional and physical hardships. It often seems we've been in one battle after another, and we have the battle scars to prove it. And it is when we are alone in the battle that things are most difficult and heart-wrenching; when all have abandoned us, when even those we thought were our friends turn away. This is also the time when the enemy likes to come and attack; and unless we remain in prayer and communion with GOD, we can easily become discouraged and depressed.

This is why we are exhorted – in the book of Hebrews – *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

How sweet it is to have REAL, GOOD fellowship with like-minded believers. Not shallow small talk, fake smiles and handshakes during *“greet your neighbor time”* at your Sunday service... but deep, meaningful fellowship and friendships with the saints of God. How wonderful to have a support system like that. It is so refreshing to our souls when we have friends we can be open, honest and transparent with as we share our Christian walk together. We can *“compare notes,”* and we can relate to one another as we let our *“Battle Scars”* show.

When I quoted from Hebrews about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, I’m not just talking about GOING to church. I’m talking about BEING the church – all in one accord – with fellow saints you KNOW are true believers and true friends that stick closer than a brother.

Some of the greatest times in my own spiritual walk have been with friends like this. Recently, one evening, following a busy day at a Christian conference, I sat with a friend, one on one, and we just talked together. We shared with one another our experiences in ministry, as well as the heavy burdens we both carry. Though our ministries – and our battles – are different, and though some of our battle scars run deeper than others, they are all part of the same spiritual warfare we’re both involved in.

And then, after we talked a long time, we PRAYED a long time, with each other and FOR each other. I’ve never felt such peace in my heart as I do at times like this. As disciples of Jesus living in the times we are living in, I UNDERSTAND what

the writer of Hebrews meant when he said, – *“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”* – how it is even MORE important as we see the Day of the Lord approaching.

The spiritual warfare continues to wage all around us. Those of us who are engaged in this warfare NEED one another. We need real, deep, intimate friendships; fellow believers we know we can TRUST in any and every circumstance. We need to KNOW they “have our backs” in our times of need. We need such friends we can talk to and pray with on a deep, intimate level – and not have to worry about gossip being spread. We need MORE than shallow, vain, repetitious corporate prayer time. We need more than “small talk” – we need REAL brothers and sisters in Christ.

It’s like a little glimpse of heaven during these intimate times with our fellow believers. As Jesus said in Matthew 18, *“For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.”* If you don’t have this in your life, I encourage you to seek it out. Pray that the Lord open those doors for you and then, even though you may have deep wounds and battle scars, let yourself be vulnerable enough to let them show, and let others know your needs. Fellowship together, PRAY together... build an intimate, close bond of friendship. Because it’s HARD living a faithful and obedient Christian life. And it’s even harder doing it all alone, with none who understand. So stand firm to the end, fellow believers... and if you need or want to talk with ME, I’d be honored to be your friend. God bless you.

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